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Bennett and Lapid Do Not Have a Moment to Spare to Form a Government

05.06.21

IDF Veterans expected to receive aid, vocation training, treatments & call center.

05.06.21

After weeks of protests, IDF veteran care gets long sought overhaul

Defense Ministry plan, dubbed 'One Soul', will direct NIS 300 million towards treatment and rehabilitation of former military members, with emphasis on treating PTSD, and include psychological aid, vocational training and closer monitoring

Yoav Zitun, Gad Lior | Published: 05.06.21 , 15:36

Following weeks of protests over the treatment of disabled IDF veterans, ministers on Thursday agreed to push through the Defense Ministry's plan to reform the treatment and rehabilitation process for wounded former members of the military.

A dispute over funding halted the progress of the proposal earlier this week.

The issue has been brought into the spotlight after Itzik Saidyan, a 26-year-old former soldier who served in the 2014 Gaza war and suffered from severe PTSD, lit himself on fire last month over the state's failure to increase his disability ranking.

The outline, dubbed "One Soul", will be budgeted at NIS 300 million (approx. \$92 million) and will be directed towards the care and rehabilitation of veterans, with an emphasis on the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder.

According to the Defense Ministry, a mechanism for aiding veterans suffering from PTSD will be established immediately and include psychological assistance for family members, vocational training, support groups, service dogs, alternative treatments and a dedicated call center.

The funding will also go toward the immediate hire of 60 people for the Rehabilitation Department and additional jobs in the IDF to begin offering aid to soldiers while they are still in service.

"After many efforts, we reached an agreement between the Prime Minister's Office and defense and finance ministries, together with the IDF Disabled Veterans Organization, on a budget [for] reforming the Rehabilitation Department," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said.

"Wounded IDF veterans are important and dear us and an immediate and fundamental reform is needed to ensure the help that they deserve."

He also vowed to convene the government "as soon as possible" to approve the reform.

"I have approved thousands of operations, attack plans and reforms in the IDF and defense establishment and yet this is one of the most important and most moral efforts I have led, and I will continue to lead the implementation of this reform and provide the proper care for IDF veterans," Defense Minister Benny Gantz said in a statement.

Following the approval of the outline, the head of the IDF Disabled Veterans Organization Idan Kleinman said: "The organization together with the government of Israel we are beginning to correct a years-long injustice, from which many disabled veterans and their families suffered in sacrificing their bodies and souls for the country's defense."

The new plan will shortly be brought before the cabinet, where it is expected to receive the necessary approvals.

On Wednesday, hundreds of disabled IDF veterans and their families gathered outside Knesset and blocked roads in Jerusalem in protest of the budgetary dispute.

05.06.21

## Palestine claims East Jerusalem their capital where land evictions fuel hostility

05.06.21

Police make 11 arrests in East Jerusalem land right dispute

The predominantly Palestinian neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah has been at the heart of a controversial legal case in which four Palestinian families face eviction after court rules land legally owned by Jews

AFP| Published: 05.06.21 , 14:23

Police arrested 11 people overnight Thursday in the latest unrest to rock the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah near the walled Old City, where land disputes between Palestinians and Jewish settlers have fuelled hostility for years.

The Red Crescent also reported that 22 Palestinians were injured during the clashes.

Palestinian protests, which began late Wednesday, continued into the early hours. The legal case centers on the homes of four Palestinian families on land claimed by Jews.

Earlier this year, the Jerusalem District Court ruled the homes legally belonged to the Jewish families, citing purchases decades ago.

The Jewish plaintiffs claimed their families lost the land during Israel's War of Independence, a conflict that also saw hundreds of thousands of Palestinians displaced from their homes.

The Palestinian families implicated in the case have provided evidence that their homes were acquired from Jordanian authorities who controlled East Jerusalem from 1948 to 1967.

Israeli settler's children look at Palestinians gathering for an Iftar meal, the evening meal with which Muslims end their daily Ramadan fast at sunset, before a demonstration as Palestinian families face eviction, part of an ongoing effort by Jewish Israelis to take control of homes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of occupied east Jerusalem

Amman has intervened in the case, providing documents to support the Palestinian claims.

Israel seized East Jerusalem in the 1967 Six-Day War and later annexed it, in a move not recognized by most of the international community.

The district court ruling infuriated Palestinians in Sheikh Jarrah who viewed it as a further step in what they see as a Jewish settler effort to drive Arabs out of East Jerusalem.

Weeks of clashes that have seen police use skunk water cannons and deploy anti-riot police on horseback have resulted in several arrests.

'We reject this'

The Supreme Court has ordered the sides to seek a compromise.

Sami Irshid, a lawyer for the Palestinians, said the Nahalat Shimon settler movement proposed that one member of each concerned Palestinian family be recognized as a "protected tenant."

That would temporarily delay eviction until the protected tenant died, at which point the home would return to Nahalat Shimon, Irshid said.

"We reject this completely," Mona al-Kurd, one of the Palestinian residents told AFP.

"The settlers want us to recognize their property rights, it is impossible."

Yehonatan Yosef, an activist with Nahalat Shimon, accused the Palestinian families of rejecting "any compromise."

"It's their problem," he said, noting that if the Supreme Court ruled in the settlers' favor, the Jewish families would do what they wished with each plot.

The Supreme Court has indicated that if the sides cannot reach a compromise, it will rule on whether the Palestinians can appeal the district court decision.

An appeal process could take years.

Israeli police stand guard in front of a Palestinian home occupied by settlers during a protest on the eve of a court verdict that may forcibly evict Palestinian families from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of Jerusalem

Mohammed Deif, the reclusive leader of the military wing of Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, issued a rare public warning on Tuesday, saying Israel would pay a "high price" over the Sheikh Jarrah dispute.

The Palestinians claim East Jerusalem as their future capital, while Israel regards the entire city as its "undivided capital."

Palestinian foreign minister Riyad al-Maliki sent a letter to the International Criminal Court urging it "to take a clear and public stand against crimes perpetrated by Israel against the Palestinian people in Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood."

05.06.21

Chikli against centrist & left asked to be given mandate to form next government

05.06.21

Rogue Yamina MK says will vote against Bennett-Lapid government

In a blow to Bennett and Lapid's coalition talks, Knesset freshman Amichai Chikli refuses to back government featuring left-wing elements of Yesh Atid chief's so-called 'coalition for change', winning praise from Netanyahu

Moran Azulay | Updated: 05.06.21, 13:35

A day after Yesh Atid chief Yair Lapid was tasked with forming Israel's next government, Yamina MK Amichai Chikli announced Thursday morning he will vote against a government headed by the centrist lawmaker and the leader of his party Naftali Bennett.

Chikli took to Twitter to express his opposition to a government featuring the left-wing Meretz and predominately Arab Joint List parties, which are a part of Lapid's so-called "coalition for change".

"Just to make things clear, I will vote against forming a government together with the Joint List and Meretz as we promised our constituents," he wrote.

Chikli also reportedly issued a letter to Bennett before meeting with President Reuven Rivlin Wednesday evening, where the right-wing lawmaker asked to be given the mandate to form the next government, stating he "opposes a government with the left."

This leaves the right-wing party with only six of its lawmakers who are in support of government talks with Lapid.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who had to return the mandate to the president after failing to form a viable coalition government, praised Chikli's "courage and integrity" and slammed Yamina for "breaking all their commitments one by one".

The Likud chairman also launched a scathing attack on Bennet, who vowed during the run-up to the March 22 elections he will not join a government with Meretz and Labor or let Lapid become prime minister under any circumstance.

"When he met with us, he had only one demand — becoming prime minister. He didn't only bring it up in person, but at each and every meeting between the negotiation teams," Netanyahu said. "Now it turns out his sole goal was to bleed out the clock until the mandate changes hands and form a dangerous government with the left in which he'll get two years as prime minister."

"Simple truth is that this is going to be a dangerous left-wing government. A deadly combination of a lack of a clear path, incompetence and irresponsibility. Bennett and [fellow Yamina MK Ayelet] Shaked promised the public they won't join a government with Lapid, Meretz and Labor. Bennett has even signed a written guarantee live on air a day before the election. Now, they're doing the exact opposite."

The premier's remarks are part of a multi-faceted campaign launched by the ruling party to thwart his political adversaries from forming a government. The pressure is expected to mount on Yamina and its lawmaker in a bid to dismantle the 7-Knesset seats strong party.

Yamina MK Abir Kara is also said to be in Likud's crosshairs, with Netanyahu reportedly promising the freshman lawmaker a spot on Likud's list for the next two election cycles, in addition to the position of economy minister.

Kara, on his end, continues to back Bennett and voices his support for forming a government with the ultra-Orthodox parties, which are long-standing allies of Netanyahu.

05.06.21

IDF helicopters struck Quneitra in the Syrian Golan Heights, near military positions

05.06.21

Israeli air strikes hit southern Syria, state media reports

SANA news agency says IDF helicopters struck Quneitra in the Syrian Golan Heights, but reports no damage or injuries; strike comes day after attack attributed to Israel killed 1, injured 6 in the country's northwestern provinces

News Agencies| Published: 05.06.21 , 09:37

Israel carried out airstrikes overnight in the southern Syrian province of Quneitra, Syrian state media and a war monitor said Thursday, though there were no reports of casualties.

The strikes came a day after one civilian was killed and six others injured in similar attacks in the northwestern region of Latakia, a bastion of President Bashar al-Assad's Alawite minority.

Official news agency SANA said there had been "an Israeli attack led by a helicopter in one of Quneitra's zones" not far from the border with Israel. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights also reported there had been "Israeli strikes".

The Britain-based war monitor, which relies on an extensive network of sources on the ground, said the strikes targeted the Syrian Army's 90th Brigade and regime military positions in north Quneitra, near the Israeli-held Golan Heights. The missile attack at dawn Wednesday occurred nearly two weeks after the IDF said a Syrian missile that reached deep into Israeli territory and set off air raid sirens near the country's top-secret nuclear reactor was the result of a misfire and not a deliberate attack.

05.06.21

Lebanon Cabinet bicker about the shape and size accelerating the country's meltdown

05.06.21

French FM in Lebanon with a message of 'great firmness'

Ahead of his arrival in the Levantine nation, which is grappling with its worst crisis since 1975-1990 civil war, Jean-Yves Le Drian justifies France's decision to impose travel restrictions on Lebanese officials suspected of corruption or hindering efforts to form government

Associated Press| Published: 05.06.21 , 11:34

France's foreign minister began a visit to Lebanon Thursday with a message of "great firmness" to its political leaders, threatening to take additional measures against officials obstructing the formation of a government in the crisis-hit country.

Tweeting ahead of his arrival, Jean-Yves Le Drian said French travel restrictions on Lebanese officials suspected of corruption or hindering the formation of a new Cabinet were "just the start."

France has been trying to force change on Lebanon's ruling class, whose corruption and mismanagement has driven the tiny country into the ground and pushed it to the verge of bankruptcy. The country is experiencing the worst economic and financial crisis of its modern history. The local currency has lost 85% of its value against the dollar in recent months while banks imposed informal controls on transfers and withdrawals.

The economic crisis was made worse by a massive explosion at Beirut's port last summer, which destroyed the facility and surrounding neighborhoods. The government of Prime Minister Hassan Diab stepped down in the wake of the explosion, and former premier Saad Hariri was tasked with forming a new one.

Hariri has not been able to form a **Cabinet** amid deep **disagreements** between him and President Michel Aoun, who has no legal recourse to fire him. The deadlock is **accelerating the country's meltdown**.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, left, meets with Lebanese President Michel Aoun at the Presidential Palace in Baabda, east of Beirut, Lebanon

"I will be in Lebanon tomorrow with a message of great firmness to political leaders and a message of our complete **solidarity to the Lebanese**," Le Drian posted Thursday. "Firmness in the face of those hindering the formation of a government: we have taken national action, and **this is just the start**."

Last week, Le Drian said France will start to put in place measures restricting access to French territory for Lebanese officials implicated in the political blockage or corruption. He did not name any of those targeted or say how many. The Foreign Ministry did not release details of what the restrictions entail.

The move **stops short of sanctions for now**, but Le Drian said **more could come later**.

Last year, **French President Emmanuel Macron** proposed a roadmap to break the political stalemate in the former French protectorate. Macron, who has previously said he is "**ashamed**" of **Lebanese politicians**, has been pressing for a Cabinet made up of non-partisan specialists who can work on urgent reforms to extract Lebanon from its multiple crises.

Those **efforts have led nowhere** as Lebanese top **officials continue to bicker about** the shape and **size of a new Cabinet, and who chooses which ministers**.

05.05.21

French minister efforts for Lebanon fails, forcing sanctions freezes & travel bans

05.05.21

Ahead of Beirut visit, French minister threatens Lebanese politicians

**France**, which is spearheading efforts to help **Lebanon** amidst its worst crisis since 1975-1990 civil war, has **so far failed** to persuade politicians to adopt **reform** road map or form a government to unlock international aid

Reuters| Published: **05.05.21** , 21 :53

**France's foreign minister** said on Wednesday he would carry a strongly worded message to Lebanese politicians when **he visits Beirut on Thursday** and **warned** of punitive measures against **those** who are **hindering the political progress**.

The trip comes after Paris said it had started putting in place measures to restrict entry to France for some Lebanese officials on the grounds that they were blocking efforts to find a solution to Lebanon's political and economic crisis.

"Firmness for those who block the formation of a government: We have taken national measures, and it is only the beginning," Jean-Yves Le Drian said on Twitter without providing details.

However, until now there has been no official announcement on what measures have actually been taken, if any, and against whom. French officials have declined to comment or respond to requests for details.

France has spearheaded international efforts to rescue Lebanon from its deepest crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war, but after eight months has failed so far to persuade squabbling politicians to adopt a reform road map or form a new government to unlock international aid.

Le Drian has said the national measures would cover access to French territory.

It is not clear how much impact such measures would have as several key Lebanese actors have dual nationality and could not be restricted, while others who could be accused of hindering the political process travel rarely to France.

Diplomats have said the national punitive measures could also have a negative impact by hardening positions in Beirut.

However, they say that France's opaque announcements could be aimed at focusing minds at European Union level, where Paris is hoping a new sanctions regime for Lebanon will be created that could ultimately see more impactful asset freezes and travel bans.

That, however, is likely to take time, diplomats have said.

Le Drian is set to meet President Michel Aoun and Shi'ite Hezbollah ally and Speaker of the Parliament Nabih Berri, although officials have declined to confirm a meeting with Prime Minister-designate Saad al-Hariri.

05.05.21

Iraq hosts Saudi-Iranian talks for regional détente after liberating their land

05.05.21

Iraq has hosted more than one round of Saudi-Iranian talks, president says

Diplomats hope direct channels between Tehran and Riyadh will signal a calming of tensions across the Mideast after years of hostilities that have brought the region close to a full-scale conflict

Reuters| Published: 05.05.21 , 19:00

Diplomats hope the opening of direct channels between Iran and Saudi Arabia will signal a calming of tensions across the Middle East after years of hostilities that have brought the region close to a full-scale conflict.



Baghdad hosted talks between officials from its two neighbors and mutual adversaries on April 9 in the only round of talks to have been previously reported.

Asked how many rounds of Saudi-Iranian talks Iraq had hosted, Salih replied: "More than once."

Washington and Tehran have engaged in indirect talks in Vienna that seek to revive an international pact reached in 2015 that constrained Iran's nuclear ambitions in return for sanctions relief.

Former U.S. President Donald Trump pulled out the deal in 2018 and imposed harsh sanctions on Iran and its regional allies, increasing tension as Iran-backed militias attacked U.S. forces in Iraq and a series of attacks hit oil installations and tankers in the Gulf, where Washington counts Arab states such as Saudi among its close allies. The killing of Iranian general Qassem Soleimani in a U.S. airstrike in Baghdad in January 2020 brought the region close to war. Iran responded with limited missile strikes against a U.S. base in Iraq, the first such direct attack, but took no further action.

Iraqis hope for a general regional detente that would allow their country to rebuild instead of being used as an arena for U.S., Gulf Arab and Iranian score-settling.

Iraq is trying to rein in powerful Iran-backed militias and deal with a resurgent Islamic State - the Sunni hardline Islamist group that took over a third of Iraq in 2014 and was beaten militarily in 2017 by U.S. forces, the Iraqi military, Kurdish fighters and Iran-aligned paramilitaries.

"The war against ISIS (Islamic State) and terrorism cannot be won by (only) military means," Salih said. "We have succeeded in liberating our land with the help of our friends but terrorism remains."

He added that he wished to see a solution to the Iran-U.S. rivalry that has fuelled violence in Iraq.

05.06.21

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signs restrictive bill curbing access to mail-in voting

05.06.21

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signs restrictive voting bill

By Kelly Mena, Caroline Kelly and Fredreka Schouten, CNN

Updated 10:27 AM ET, Thu May 6, 2021

(CNN)Florida Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis on Thursday morning signed into law a controversial voting bill aimed at curbing access to mail-in voting in the state, joining a host of other GOP-led states pushing new limits in connection with former President Donald Trump's baseless claims of fraud in the 2020 election.

MORE ON VOTING RIGHTS

Republican state lawmakers are looking to empower partisan poll watchers, setting off alarms about **potential voter intimidation**.

See where lawmakers have introduced bills that would make it harder to vote

GOP-led legislatures push forward with efforts to **restrict voting access**

In signing the bill during an appearance on "Fox & Friends," the Florida Republican highlighted provisions of the bill including **stricter voter ID requirements for voting by mail**, creating limits on **who can pick up and return a voter's ballot**, and **banning private funding for elections**.

"Me signing this bill says: Florida, your vote counts, your **vote is going to be cast with integrity and transparency** and this is a great place for democracy," DeSantis said after signing the bill.

Local media outlets told CNN that they were not allowed to go inside the morning **signing event and that it was a Fox News exclusive**.

Some of the restrictions created by the bill, Senate **Bill 90**, also include expanding **partisan observation power during ballot tabulation** and creating **additional restrictions for drop box use**.

**The new Florida voting law faces immediate legal challenges.**

A coalition that includes the League of Women Voters of Florida and the Black Voters Matter Fund announced it had filed a lawsuit within minutes of DeSantis signing the law. It challenges several provisions, including its new restrictions on ballot drop boxes and the **prohibition on organizations and volunteers returning ballots on behalf of voters**.

A separate lawsuit filed Thursday morning by Common Cause, Florida branches of the NAACP and a disabilities rights group describes the new law as "the latest in a long line of **voter suppression laws** targeting Florida's Black voters, Latino voters, and voters with disabilities."

Last week, after days of contentious debate and last-minute amendments bouncing between chambers, the Florida Republican-controlled state House and Senate came to an agreement and approved SB90 along party-line votes on the eve of the state's final day of the legislative session.

The bill is part of a **Republican-led effort nationwide to restrict voting access at the state level** in the wake of record turnout in last November's elections. A tally by the left-leaning Brennan Center for Justice at New York University found that **361 bills** with provisions **that restrict voting had been introduced in 47 states** as of March 24.

In the past month, the effort to restrict voting has intensified as state legislatures begin to head into the final months of their respective sessions.

Democrats frequently mentioned the continued public fallout from Georgia's recent election overhaul bill during debate on the Florida measure, which they called a "revival of Jim Crow in this state."

"That bill that was passed in the state just north of us sent us a message, and the response to that bill should let us know we should not be doing this," Democratic state Rep.

Michael Grieco said during House debate, pleading, "Please do not Georgia my Florida." Florida Republicans, who have repeatedly acknowledged that their state ran a successful and secure 2020 election, said the bill would provide "guardrails" to **prevent** anyone from **"gaming the system"** in the future.

"We've had voter ID. It works. It's the right thing to do," DeSantis said on Fox News last week, adding that the state's 2020 election was "fair and transparent, and the reforms we have coming will make it even better."

DeSantis' signature comes as former President **Trump continues to cement his hold on the Republican Party.**

On Monday, **Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney**, the **No. 3 House Republican**, publicly **rejected Trump's** most recent false charge that **he would've won the 2020 election if not for "fraudulent" votes**, her latest rebuke of the former president that has put her at odds with many members of her own party.

"The 2020 presidential **election was not stolen**," **Cheney tweeted** on Monday. "Anyone who claims it was is spreading THE BIG LIE, turning their back on the rule of law, and poisoning our democratic system."

**Cheney is now facing backlash from her fellow Republicans** and is **expected to be removed** from her leadership position.

CNN's Dianne Gallagher, Wesley Bruer, Jade Gordon, Alex Rogers and Manu Raju contributed to this story.

**05.06. 21**

**Bennett and Lapid Do Not Have a Moment to Spare to Form a Government**

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**Bennett and Lapid Do Not Have a Moment to Spare to Form a Government**

It's said that haste is of the devil; in Lapid and Bennett's current political reality, they **have to establish** a government **as if** they were being **chased by demons**

May. 6, 2021 12:06 AM

Naftali **Bennett spoke** on Wednesday for the first time **as a future prime minister**, rather than as a gymnast doing the splits, his legs pointing in opposite directions.

**Over the past 29 days, he has played both sides:** Yair Lapid and Benjamin Netanyahu.

It's possible that this is precisely where he always intended to end up – **eluding blame for the failure** to form a government of the right-wing, ultra-Orthodox and United Arab List (except by Netanyahu and his embittered lackeys in the media).

That chapter is over, although **it's not clear if the end is final**. In his remarks, **Bennett locked himself into** a single indispensable idea: **"No" to a fifth round of elections**, which he described in a thousand uncomplimentary ways, calling it everything from a "self-destructive disease" to an "expensive and unnecessary farce" to "a direct hit on human life." Neither did he hesitate to point his finger at the man frantically seeking such an unworthy goal, due to the prime minister's own personal-legal interests.

It is now money time in **Bennett's coalition** negotiations with Lapid, who has the actual mandate from the president to form a government, and the Yamina chairman **is weaker than ever**. His faction is teetering. His rookie Knesset member Amichai Chikli – whom

Bennett plucked from some college and placed in an electable position on the party's election slate – has stabbed him in the back, announcing that he opposes a government “with Lapid and the left” (although he's actually okay with the party of the Islamic Movement, as long as it supports a Netanyahu government). A person with “values” would have returned the Knesset seat that was not actually his but rather that of the person who appointed him.

It's said that haste is of the devil. In **Lapid and Bennett's** current political **reality**, **they have to hurry and establish a government** as if they were being chased by demons. The framework for the government is agreed upon: a government with factions of equal power and a rotation at the top. The assignment of cabinet posts is a resolvable issue. All of the potential partners **share good will a strong desire to rid themselves of the dangerous man in the Prime Minister's Office.**

**Netanyahu won't step aside** in a gentlemanly manner **and permit them to patiently negotiate.** Beset as he is by failure, **his eviction** from what he views as his birthright – the prime minister's residence on Balfour Street – **is closer than ever**, and the danger of the situation is increasing.

On Wednesday he again delivered a “declaration.” Eshausted, gray as sackcloth, and not just because of the color of his hair, he reverted to his entirely worn-out slogans about “a dangerous left-wing government” and the “uncontrollable ambition of Bennett to be prime minister, at any price.” It was a loser's speech.

And it was actually the man who received the mandate from the president to form a government, who, for the first time, made do with a terse statement without grabbing more airtime for himself. **Almost a decade after he entered political life, Lapid is being asked to form a government,** but as the Messiah's donkey. He has given up first dibs on the position of prime minister to achieve the supreme goal that in his view is essential to the country's fate: removing Netanyahu. Lapid has proven his maturity. From his standpoint, even if, like the Messiah, his arrival is delayed, **his time will come.**